

STATE OF MICHIGAN

Family  
Independence  
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## FY 2003 budget lays foundation for future

State Budget Director Don Gilmer presented Governor John Engler's fiscal year 2003 budget to a joint session of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees Feb. 7.

"Despite the economic slowdown that Michigan has experienced, I believe the underlying economy is sound and the long-term outlook for our state is positive," said Gov. John Engler.

"The budget I am presenting boosts spending for schools, maintains a tremendous investment in Michigan's higher education system, improves health coverage for children, low-income families and disabled persons, strengthens public safety activities, expands drug benefits for seniors, and protects critical programs for low-income residents of the state."

The proposed budget for fiscal year 2003 totals \$39.4 billion. This includes \$9.2 billion in general fund spending, \$11.2 billion from the School Aid Fund, \$1.5 billion in revenue sharing support for local governments, \$2 billion in state transportation spending, and \$11.1 billion in federal revenues.

In a year when revenues are expected to be lower and many agencies received reduced budgets in the executive proposal, the Family Independence Agency budget proposal received a 3.3 percent increase for all sources and a 2.8 percent increase from the state General Fund. This was one of the largest state General Fund increases among all proposed state budgets.

Budget highlights that would, if enacted, affect FIA include:

- The Early Retirement program, proposed Feb. 5, is expected to generate \$50 million in general fund savings.
- Medicaid is currently one of the state's largest expenditures and the service demand is expected to rise. The budget covers \$247 million for Medicaid increases with a withdrawal from the Medicaid Benefits Trust Fund. Even after this withdrawal, the fund will have a balance of \$280 million at the end of next year.
- The budget recommends an additional \$60.2 million in federal funding to cover Family Independence Program cash assistance for 92,100 families, which is a 20 percent increase over the current caseload.
- The budget proposal includes \$23 million in new state funds to match available federal day care revenues for 70,000 low-income families who continue to rely on the state for day care assistance in fiscal year 2003.
- Increases of \$7.7 million for the State Emergency Relief program for energy-related home repairs, rent assistance, and other forms of emergency assistance, and \$18.9 million in federal Energy Assistance awards to support the home heating credit, energy-related crisis intervention payments, and weatherization activities.
- The spending plan includes an additional \$113 million to finance a new initiative, the MIFamily Plan. This will expand Medicaid benefits and improve health care access for more than 200,000 Michigan residents. Michigan will also seek to increase federal funding as a match for state mental health funds, thereby increasing overall mental health appropriations by \$50 million.

The budget proposal is now before the state House and Senate.

- **The fiscal year 2003 Executive Budget—including a printable six-page summary of the proposed FIA budget—is available on the state's home portal at [www.michigan.gov](http://www.michigan.gov)**

# Soup's on!

## FIA employee starts soup business to fund Sept. 11 donations

By Christine Doolittle, Secretary  
FIA Departmental Services Division, Lansing  
Telephone (517) 373-3690

Soup's on!

That is the now familiar cry heard at lunchtime once a week on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor of Lansing's Grand Tower Building by soup guru Helen Squiers.

Helen, who manages state vehicles for the Family Independence Agency, has been making homemade soup for the past several months. Every Wednesday, the aroma of some delicious brew is in the air throughout the floor.

The idea came about from Helen's desire to help the victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attack. She was looking for a way to raise funds for the American Red Cross relief effort.

Not content with the conventional method of 'passing the hat' to collect money, Helen came up with the creative idea of making and selling homemade soup for lunch. Armed with the knowledge of her co-workers' weakness for anything edible, Helen announced her plans and arrived at work on "Soup Wednesday" with the first of many delightful mixtures.

It didn't take long for word (and that enticing aroma of homemade soup) to spread beyond the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, and Helen now finds herself with many faithful soup followers from all over the Grand Tower Building, the FIA's administrative home in Lansing where around 1,200 people work daily. Helen has also expanded her operation to include selling soup bowls!

Helen markets via e-mail to FIA staff in the Grand Tower. This was her message on Feb. 27:

*"Wintry cold outside and a good day to have a hot lunch...lucky for you, you can do that and not even leave the building...IT'S SOUP Wednesday...hot and ready to warm your tummy...New supply of bowls to choose from...Black bean and rice w/turkey and just a hint of spice...You don't have a soup bowl you say...well, I can take care of that too...(New supply of bowls) Now you can buy a sturdy ceramic soup bowl that is reusable and man-sized. Washed and ready to use...So hurry and get your own personal soup bowl. All proceeds donated to American Red Cross... So SOUP IT UP...and help our fellow man and our country...The American Red Cross and fellow Americans thank you."*

Helen even takes special requests from staff to make favorite soups. It is estimated she sells 25-30 bowls of soup in an average week. Soup in your own bowl is \$2 (\$3 if you have an oversized bowl) or you can purchase a sturdy ceramic soup bowl (with soup) for \$5, with refills of \$3 per bowl—all available on a first come, first served basis.

Through Feb. 20, Helen and her co-workers have raised \$495 for the American Red Cross from soup sales. Some Wednesday when you are visiting the Grand Tower and your stomach starts growling for lunch, wander up to the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, Suite 1203, to buy some of Helen's scrumptious homemade soup!



## FIA Icon

a publication of Michigan  
Family Independence Agency

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# From the Director

By Douglas E. Howard

Director, Family Independence Agency



## Thanks and very well done!

One of the worst kept secrets in the FIA has been our effort to reduce Food Assistance processing errors. Our program that began in February and continued through March—the one we called a “case read sweep”—changed the work lives of thousands of us. If you were one of those employees directly or indirectly affected, thanks for your good work, well done!

I think it's important to reinforce some the themes we discussed when the sweep started:

- **Organizational focus.** People from all levels of our agency, including policy staff, assisted counties in reading cases, and people from all levels of our agency must be part of the ongoing solution.
- **Results based quality customer service.** Our focus is to assure accuracy of Food Assistance benefits that contribute to the health of families and individuals across Michigan, and meets the expectations of the public.
- **Continuous quality improvement.** As well as assuring the accuracy of benefits in the cases we reviewed, the sweep will give us information we can use to plan how to continually improve accuracy and take steps to continuously improve.
- **Fiscal accountability.** Our Food Assistance error rate is probably more important to us today than it has been anytime since the welfare reform period began. We must improve our accuracy or risk additional federal sanctions.

Governor Engler proposed a state budget for the new fiscal year beginning in October based on lower expected revenues combined with increased demands for certain state services. The Family Independence Agency budget for FY 2003 received one of the largest increases in state funding of any agency in state government, an acknowledgment by the governor that our agency will likely have increased caseloads until or unless the economy recovers and prosperity returns.

Reducing our Food Assistance error rate has been a multi-year task where we have had some success. Now, because of the state of the economy and the tightness of state budgets, there will be nowhere to go if we are required to pay millions of dollars in fines because of our error rate. We have no alternative but to get better.

We are not alone in this matter, as many states struggle with this. Sometimes, this effort can be extremely frustrating and even seem a lonely trial to stay on top of. But together we've seen a lot of successes in our state.

We've seen most counties achieve success in getting customers into the work place. We've had unprecedented successes helping abused children find permanent loving homes. We've had great success developing new and innovative programs under Project Zero that involve our communities and our community partners. We've had some significant technology successes, as well.

Now we need to have another success, this time with our Food Assistance error rate. The case read was difficult but important. Together, I know we can get where we need to go. For what's happened the last couple months and will happen in the months to come, let me say again: Thanks for your good work, well done!

# Intercepted letters

**Date:** March 1  
**To:** Sue Leahy, Manager  
FIA Child Welfare Institute

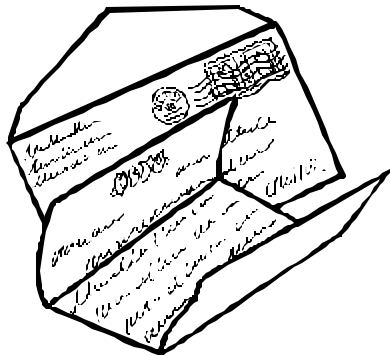
As promised I followed up and asked my staff how they like the institute. They love it! The staff who are graduating are more comfortable. The restructuring has been extremely positive. It's a little more work for my supervisors because they have to find the situations that mirror what was taught in class. However, this is extremely valuable for the students. Just to reiterate, to move from the philosophy to more practical was the right direction.

**Denise Chambers**  
Director, Genesee County Family Independence Agency  
Flint

■ The Child Welfare Institute is an eight-week, skill based training program for new Family Independence Agency and contract agency staff. Program areas addressed by CWI include Children's Protective Services, Foster Care, Adoption, and Juvenile Justice. It is administered through the FIA Child and Family Services Administration.

**Date:** Feb. 13  
**To:** FIA Icon  
**Subj:** Intercepted letters

I read your fine publication regularly. For some time now you have a section called "Intercepted letters." Every time I see that heading, I have a low-grade negative association or reaction. While the word "intercepted" catches ones eye, it does not create a positive image. Furthermore, it does not communicate the intent of the "Letters' Section," unless it is to prevent, hinder or interrupt a flow of communication.



Here is why. The Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1974) gives a number of meanings. Among them are: Intercept, vt: to stop, seize or interrupt in progress or course or before arrival; to prevent, hinder; to interrupt communication or connection with; to gain possession of (an opponent's pass). Interception: the interception of a missile by an interceptor or of a target by a missile.

**Rom Kriauciunas, Ph.D.**  
Lansing

**Date:** Feb. 11  
**To:** Kate Young, Director  
FIA Adoption Subsidy Program  
**Subj:** Thanks

I intended on sending this letter six months ago (when) I was working at Ennis Center for Children as adoption supervisor. During my time at Ennis I had several opportunities to contact you in an effort to resolve subsidy issues where children had fallen off the system. In these situations you were able to resolve the dilemmas and the children were formally placed in their adoptive homes.

It is easy working in a bureaucracy to view situations from only a narrow view and not the bigger picture. From these experiences that is not the case with you and with your staff. You are able to balance the letter of the law and the spirit of the law and focus on children we serve.

I want to compliment you and your staff for your wonderful balance and sensitivity for children. It is a real pleasure knowing the efforts you make for children.

**Charles A. Ludwig**  
Director, Volunteer Advocates for Children  
Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County  
Pontiac

# Kathryn traded assistance for seven-day work

**Achiever of the Month moved north for better life, is finding it**

By Richard Calkins, Project Zero Coordinator

Montmorency-Oscoda Family Independence Agency

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LEWISTON—Montmorency County was glad to host the 98<sup>th</sup> Achiever of the Month award program when Kathryn LeDuc became the award winner Jan. 25. She was honored at a ceremony at Garland Resort in Lewiston.

Douglas E. Howard, director, Michigan Family Independence Agency, presented a plaque to Kathryn saying it was to, “Ms. LeDuc, who, in the face of tremendous odds, has exhibited her ability to meet life’s challenges while making progress toward economic independence.”

Montmorency-Oscoda County FIA director Jim Beach proudly hosted the event and congratulated Kathryn on her success.

Kathryn has a tremendous attitude and spirit. She is currently employed seven days a week at Wayne Wire Airbag, a manufacturing company located in Hillman. As a model of success, Kathryn was invited to attend the next FIA’s Director’s Client Advisory Meeting in June.

“Achiever’s input is very valuable to our agency. It shapes future policy so we can celebrate more success in Michigan,” Howard said.



Kathryn LeDuc

## **Trials of life**

Kathryn is a single mother of two children, Charles, Age 13, and Katherine Rose, age 9. She applied for assistance in 1988 when she was pregnant and needed help providing for her unborn child. Kathryn was on and off assistance for the next several years while working a variety of part-time jobs. She was thankful for the help she received but was focused on improving life for her family.

Kathryn moved from St. Clair County to Montmorency County in search of a better life for her children.

She obtained employment one week after being referred to Work First and attending personal enrichment and pride classes. Work First also helped her in purchasing work clothing and provided mileage reimbursement.

Kathryn credits her family and friends as being supportive in her venture to a new life.

Her sister, Helen LeDuc, helped her obtain employment at Wayne Wire Airbag and supportive in carpooling to and from work. Kathryn said, “Helen’s been great, she has always been there for me whenever she was needed.”

Her mother, Nellie Cornell, was also very helpful in providing day care for her grandchildren.

Kathryn said her friend, Mark Boughner, has been very supportive. “His caring and emotional support has been constant,” she said. “He has made it easy for me to continue to do my best for my family.”

Through this all, the real inspiration was her children. Kathryn’s FIP case closed in November 2001 due to earnings. She continues to receive Transitional Medicaid, Food Assistance benefits and Child Day Care.



***To Strengthen Michigan Families***  
***Achiever of the Month***



# President's welfare proposal

President George Bush introduced his proposal for continuing welfare reform Feb. 26. The document is not a lawmaking proposal but will contribute to legislative proposals as the U.S. Congress debates renewal of the federal welfare reform act that expires Sept. 30.

You can view or print the 37-page PDF document "Working Toward Independence" at this White House web site: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/02/welfare-reform-announcement-book.html>

## National Volunteer Week

By Diana Algra

FIA Volunteer Services Liaison, Lansing

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National Volunteer Week, April 21-27, 2002, is a time to recognize and celebrate the efforts of volunteers at the local, state and national levels. This year's National Volunteer Week theme is "Celebrate the American Spirit -- VOLUNTEER!"

The FIA has a long history of volunteer involvement. In the late 1960s the volunteer services program office was established. Since that time our agency has increased the number of staff dedicated to recruiting, training and placing volunteers.

Last year our agency was fortunate to have volunteers give over 571,812 hours of service to assist our customers. These hours are valued at \$8,800,186 based on the Independent Sectors rate of \$15.39 per hour. Once again, our volunteer service coordinators and our volunteers in the field deserve our most heartfelt thanks. The FIA is also proud and thankful for all of our employees that give of themselves to their community by volunteering. I congratulate you all and encourage you to pass along to our volunteers our deepest thanks.

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